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CEMETERIES AND MOSQUE TOMBS, CAIRO.

BY EDWARD THOMAS ROGERS, ESQ., LATE H.M. CONSUL AT CAIRO, AND HIS SISTER, MARY ELIZA ROGERS.

THE DRAWINGS BY GEORGE L. SEYMOUR.



Among the Mohammedans the link between the living and the dead is perseveringly kept up, and the memory of the dead fostered by frequent visits to the graves of departed friends.

It is very usual for all the females and children of a Mohammedan family to go regularly once a week, generally on Thursday or Friday, to the burial-ground, to commune with the dead,

and to place flowers or branches of trees on the family grave.

Of every Oriental town or city the cemetery is one of the most prominent features; many ancient towns are almost entirely girdled by tombs.

The Mohammedan cemeteries of Cairo are all situated to the south and to the east of the city, on elevated desert land which is never inundated by the Nile.

The Jewish cemetery is at a considerable distance from the city, on the south side.

The Coptic and European cemeteries adjoin each other, and are not far from the arm of the Nile which forms the Isle of Rhoda, and near to Mesr-el-'Atika, south-west of Cairo; the English cemetery being within sight of the old trees and wayside fountain shown in page 129, vol. 1879.

The most extensive of the Mohammedan cemeteries are those on the south side of the city, and here are the large mosque tombs of the Imâm Shâfe'i, and of Muhammed Ali and many members of his family (see p. 194, vol. 1879). At some distance from these, and approaching near to the citadel, are the so-called tombs of the Mamlûks. Many of these buildings are remarkable for beauty of design and careful workmanship, but their history is unknown, and they are rapidly falling to decay. The domes, which are generally very lofty, and rest on high circular drums pierced with many windows, are nearly all either enriched with zigzag ornament, or simply ribbed as in the dome shown in the illustration, p. 329, vol. 1879, which represents the finest minaret in this group, but the mosque to which it belonged no longer exists. The whole of this region is dotted with grave-stones, and is still used as a burial-ground. Some of the ancient mausolea have been invaded and converted into family graves. There is another Mohammedan cemetery on the north side of the citadel, and a much larger one to the north-east of the city, just outside the Bab en Nasr, or Gate of Victory.

In this crowded cemetery there is one grave which is of peculiar interest to Europeans, namely, that of the celebrated traveller, John Lewis Burckhardt, a native of Switzerland, one of the most enterprising and able of modern explorers of the East, and the discoverer of the rock-hewn city of Petra. He professed the Mohammedan religion, and was known as Sheikh Ibrahim the

Pilgrim, having made the pilgrimage to Mecca in the year 1814. He unhappily died at Cairo in the year 1817, at the early age of thirty-three, while he was waiting for a caravan to convey him to Timbuctoo.

His grave remained unmarked until the year 1873, when, owing to the exertions of Mr. E. T. Rogers, a handsome tomb of white marble was erected over it. This tomb is of purely Mohammedan character, and consists of a rather high oblong structure, faced with marble, like a table tomb, called a *tarbikah*, which rests on a projecting base. On the *tarbikah* there are two tall, narrow, upright slabs (called *shahîd*), one at the head, and one at the foot. The one at the head is the larger, and is surmounted by a carved turban; on its outer face there is an Arabic inscription (the letters of which are raised, not engraved) recording the adopted name of the deceased, "Sheikh Hajj Ibrahim el Mahdy, son of Abdallah Burckhardt of Lausanne," and the dates of his birth (1199) and death (1232), and of the erection of the tomb (1288), according to the Mohammedan era.

Beneath this, on the *tarbikah*, are the words, "In the name of God the most merciful;" and the "Throne verse" from the second chapter of the Koran on the other sides. The authorities would not permit a single word of English to appear upon this tomb. It is now protected by a small square building with a cupola, similar to those erected over the tomb of any eminent sheikh or person of note.

In some instances the cupola is supported by four marble columns, and the inscription on the headstone is composed of raised letters in gold on a blue ground.

A Mohammedan family grave consists generally of an oblong vault with an arched roof, made of brick and plastered over, large enough to hold four or more persons, and sufficiently high to enable the deceased to sit up in it easily, on the first night after his interment, to answer the crucial questions of the angels Munkar and Nakir, the examiners of the dead: the wicked they severely torture, but to the good they are gracious. The soul remains in the body until after this examination.

It sometimes happens that the males and females of a family are buried in the same vault; but, when this is the case, a partition is always built up between them. Over the vault a tombstone is erected similar in form to the one above described. Such monuments, however, vary very much in height and detail, some few being of marble, and enriched with ornamental inscriptions, while the greater number are of stone or brick, and quite plain.

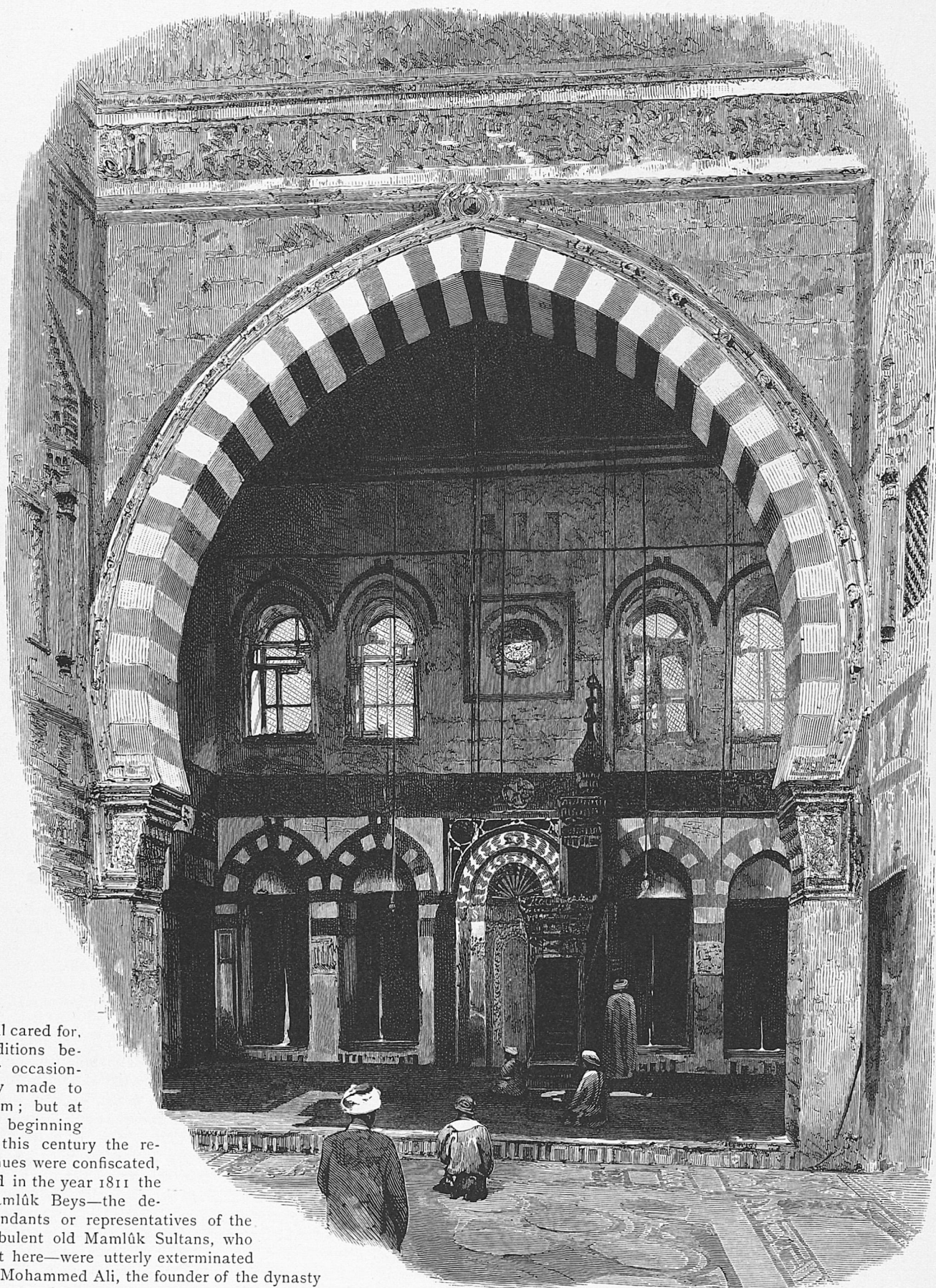
Mohammed directed that tombs should be low, and constructed of crude bricks, and never be inscribed with the name of God, or with words from the Koran; but these commands are strangely disregarded.

From the cemetery of Bab en Nasr a road leads due east to an isolated mosque tomb, commonly called Sheikh Galah; its minaret is engraved on p. 260, vol. 1879. Opposite, and to the south of this, there is a hill, crowned with windmills, a sunny sketch of which is shown on p. 87 of the same volume. From the eastern slope of the hill an excellent view is obtained of the marvellously beautiful tombs commonly, but erroneously, called the "Tombs of the Khalifs." They are the mosque tombs of the Circassian or Berghite Mamlûk Sultans, whose dynasty endured from A.D. 1382 to 1517, and they furnish a complete representation of the graceful architecture of that period. They are constructed of alternate courses of white and black limestone, or entirely of white stone with alternate courses painted red. Many of the buildings are of vast extent, comprising not only a mosque with large open court and one or two dome-covered tombs, but suites of reception-rooms for mourners, male and female, extensive stables, and numerous dwellings for the necessarily

large staff of mosque officials and their families. These mausolea were originally richly endowed, and for many generations were

well cared for, additions being occasionally made to them; but at the beginning of this century the revenues were confiscated, and in the year 1811 the Mamlúk Beys—the descendants or representatives of the turbulent old Mamlúk Sultans, who rest here—were utterly exterminated by Mohammed Ali, the founder of the dynasty now ruling in Egypt.

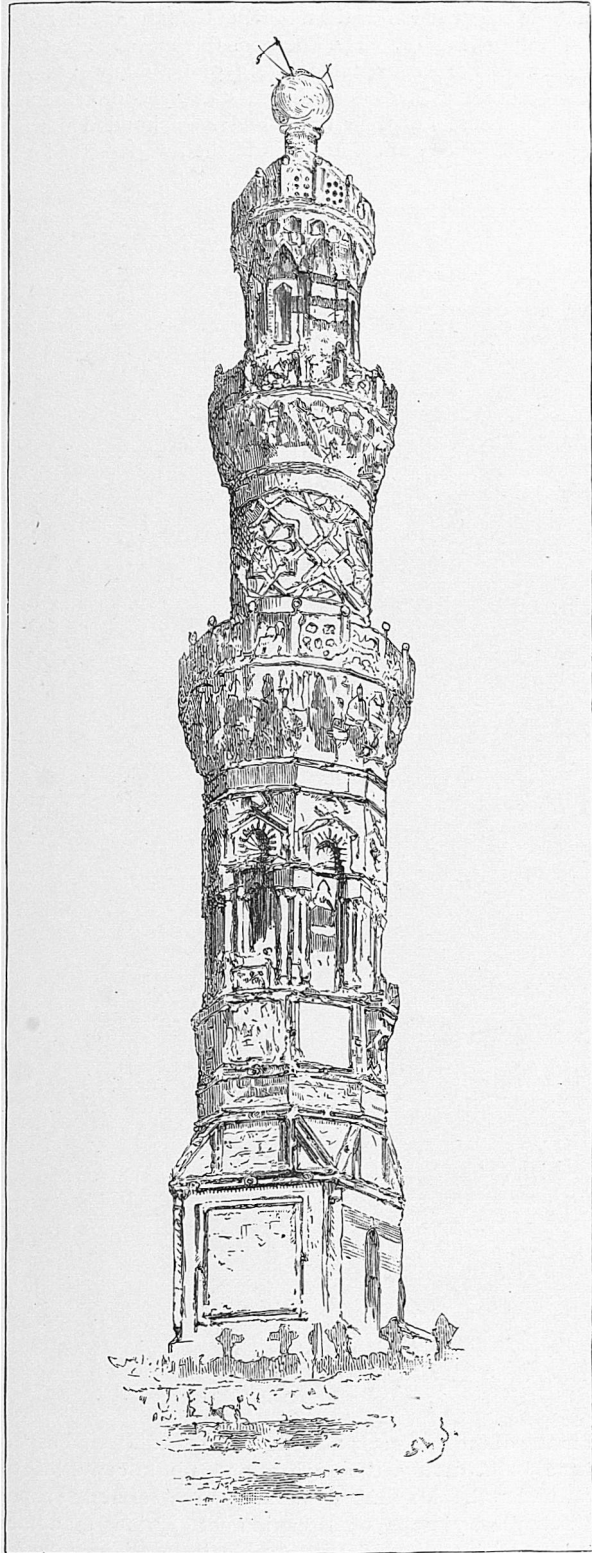
Descendants of the families of the custodians of the tombs and of the mosque attendants still cling to the spot, living among the ruins or in the dwellings round about them. Some habitable houses opposite



Interior of Mosque of Kait Bay.

to the tomb of Kaït Bay are shown in the little sketch on page 101, vol. 1879. See the women on the roof.

At the north-eastern extremity of the necropolis there are several clusters of huts inhabited by Fellahîn, which contrast strangely with the stately mausoleum of the Sultan Barkûk, which rises up majestically in the midst of them, with its lofty

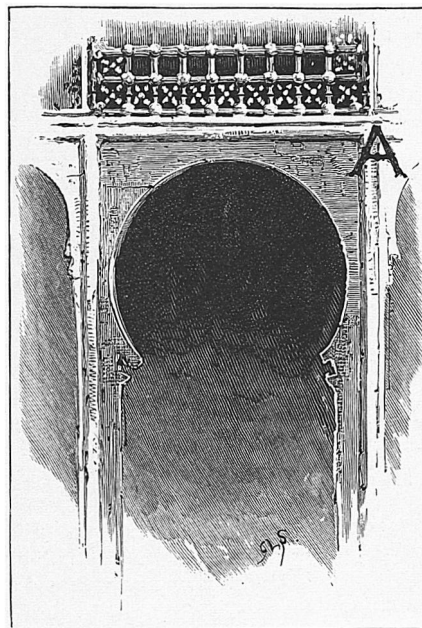


Minaret of Tomb of Kaït Bay, Cairo.

walls, its two superb domes and two tall minarets. El Barkûk, who was the founder of his dynasty, died in the year A.D. 1399. He was buried under the larger dome, in the east angle of the mosque: the female members of the family were buried under the dome in the south angle, and the sanctuary occupies the space between them. These domes are covered with zigzag

ornament, and rest on drums pierced with round-arched windows, in some of which there are remains of tracery. The minarets are on the north-western side of the building, and are 160 feet in height. They are precisely alike, except that they are in slightly different stages of dilapidation. The lower portion is square, with a trefoil-headed arch in a rectangular recess, enriched with pendentives on each side, opening on to a balcony supported by pendentive brackets. The next story, which rises above a broad square balcony, is cylindrical, and on its surface is carved a bold but simple pattern formed of interlacing lines. The upper story, which rises out of a circular balcony, is octagonal. This portion is, in both minarets, unfortunately very much injured, and has been rudely repaired. It was formed of light marble columns supporting trefoil-headed arches, bearing a roof from which projected an octagonal balcony, and above this rose the usual finial. The marble columns are now almost hidden by masonry built up in the spaces between them, and of the balustrades of the balconies only fragments are left. But these minarets, in their pristine state, must have been perfect examples of what Mr. Fergusson calls "the most beautiful form of tower architecture in the world."

At the northern external corner of the building there is a sebîl, with a loggia above it which was the school. Its six pointed arches resting on marble columns are of very pure and beautiful form. Adjoining it there is a lofty and highly enriched doorway, which was the principal entrance to the mosque: the present entrance is near to the west corner, and is also richly adorned with pendentives. On the upper part of the north-west wall there is a frieze formed of an Arabic inscription carved in stone. Many of the windows, of which some are pointed and others rectangular, are now blocked up with masonry. The beautiful colonnades, vaulted with brickwork, and the western apartments formerly occupied by the mosque officials, are in a lamentable state of decay. This building stands at some little distance from the other mosque tombs, which form a long straggling group stretching southwards.



Horseshoe Arch in Woodwork in front of a Recess.

ROAD from the north leads to the beautiful tomb of the Sultan El Ashraf Abu el Nasr Kaït Bay, who died in the year 1496. It is neither so large nor so regular in form as that of the Sultan Barkûk, but the design is extremely graceful. The surface of the well-proportioned dome of limestone is carved into a network of geometrical lines, under which spreads a foliated tracery, with an ornament resembling a fleur-de-lis frequently repeated. The drum of the dome is pierced with round-arched windows, and over them there is a beau-

tifully carved Arabic inscription. The minaret, which is 164 feet in height, is remarkable for the delicacy of the tracery of its stone balconies; it is engraved on this page. The principal entrance has a lofty and highly enriched porch (see page 238, vol. 1879). Adjoining it there is a sebîl, or fountain, surmounted by a loggia, with two arches of horseshoe form at the front, and three at the side, resting on marble columns with sculptured capitals. This is the medreseh, or school; the front of it is shown on the next page.

The interior of the mosque is richly adorned with mosaics.

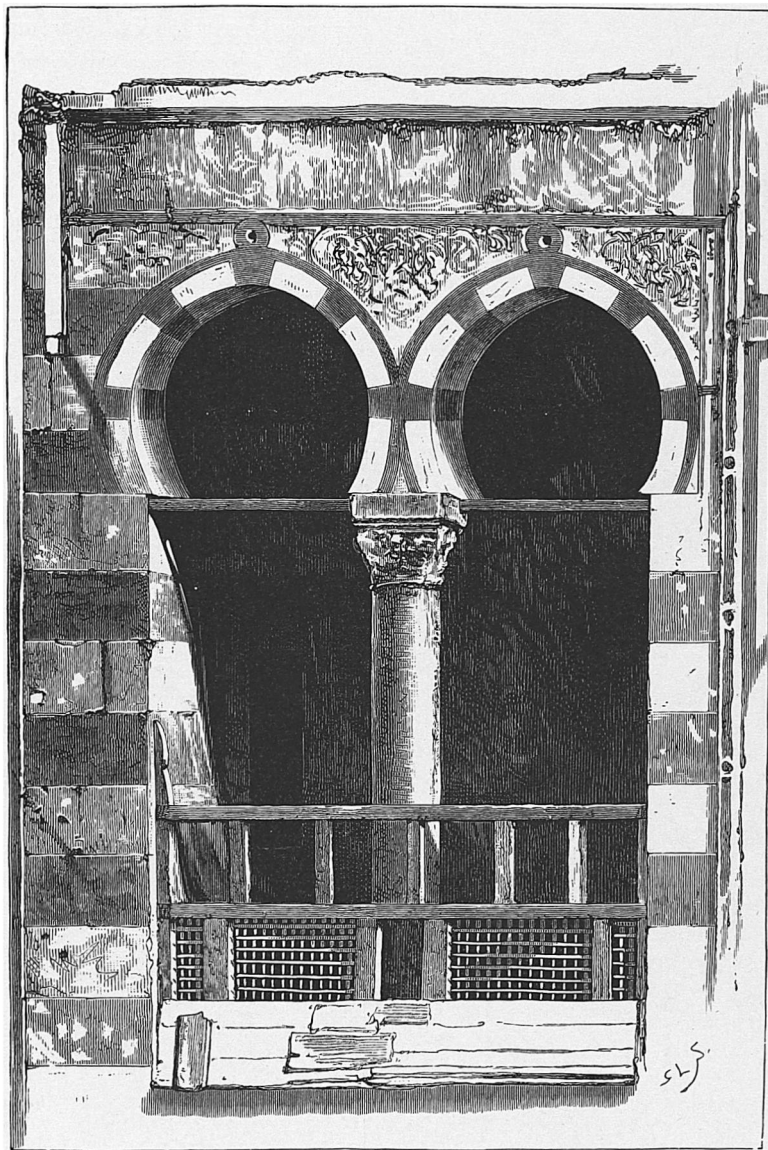
The arch of the sanctuary is of horseshoe form, as may be seen from the excellent representation of it on the previous page. Within the mausoleum two stones are preserved, which are said to have been brought by Kaït Bay from Mecca, with impressions upon them of the feet of the prophet Mohammed. One of these stones is covered with a wooden canopy, and the other with a bronze dome. The now open court of this mosque was once covered by a latticed lantern.

The indifference and neglect with which the authorities treat these unique specimens of Mohammedan architecture are inexplicable when we see the large sums of money spent on mosques of very questionable taste and design.

The pavement in most of the early mosques is crumbling to

pieces, mosaic patterns are displaced, the vaults and domes exhibit open cracks, which will gradually lead to their collapse in a very few years; indeed, any one who has visited them from time to time during the last twenty years cannot fail to observe a further deterioration in each successive visit.

Of new mosques the most important is that of the citadel, built by Mohammed Ali of Oriental alabaster. Another large mosque is in course of construction by the mother of the late Khedive, near to that of Sultan Hassan. The doors for this mosque are the most beautiful works of Art executed in Egypt for many years. The Princess-mother invited some celebrated cabinet-makers in whose families the secrets of their trade had been handed down from father to son for centuries, and established workshops for them



Window of the Medreseh attached to the Mausoleum of Kaït Bay, Cairo.

in her palace. Her Highness made them teach their art to a few apprentices: they have worked for more than twelve years on the doors of this mosque. The panels are made of small pieces of wood fitted together with geometrical precision, like a Chinese puzzle, without glue, pins, or nails, and they are held together by the strong framework. The front part is inlaid with ivory, mother-of-pearl, or variegated woods. Some time ago the work of the mosque was stopped on account of a weakness in the columns intended to support the dome. The only doors that are hung *in situ* are those of the apartment in which are enshrined the remains of the amiable Princess Zeinab Hanum, daughter of the late Khedive, who died a few years ago.

In many of the mosques and mausolea of Cairo—and especially in those built during the eighth and ninth centuries of the Hejra, under the Mamlûk dynasties—were formerly suspended beautiful glass lamps of Egyptian or Syrian manufacture. They were richly adorned with Arabic inscriptions in coloured letters, recording the name and titles of the sultan or other personage by whom, or in whose memory, the mosque had been built, and on many of them was also enamelled the following appropriate verse from the Koran (chap. xxiv. verse 35):—"God is the light of the heavens and of the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche containing a lamp, the lamp in a glass, and the glass as though it were a shining star."